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Focusing on positivity during the COVID-19 crisis: A New York health system strategy

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Abstract

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, spreading positivity has become a core mission of Northwell Health, the largest integrated health system in New York. As a state and community health system, we are forever changed, but our need for compassion, humanism, and connection has never wavered. Creating innovative ways to bring humanity to the forefront, hope and optimism echo across the organization as initiatives, forums, and acts of gratitude have ensued.

Keywords

Positivity, humanity, connection, resiliency, patient experience, COVID-19

Introduction

There is a rainbow at the end of many storms. It doesn't mean that the storm never happened or that it didn't leave immense wreckage in its aftermath. It means that there is always a ray of light among the clouds. Amidst this time of uncertainty, we know one thing to be true... the best of human nature arises during challenging times. As the spread and far-reaching impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic dominate our world, now, more than ever is the time for us to create small moments of light during the storm.

At the center of the global COVID-19 pandemic lies New York, an epicenter of coronavirus cases. New Yorkers have overcome trying times in the past and have come out better on the other end. This pandemic is no different. Leading the way to better days is Northwell Health, the largest integrated health system in New York. Northwell Health is made up of 70,000+ employees, 3,300 physicians, 23 hospitals, and 750+ medical practice site locations across New York State. Made for this, a core tenant of the organization is precisely what our health care workers are embodying. They are on the frontlines, risking their own lives, being away from their families, to take care of us when we need it most.

Amid the spread of worry, anxiety, and instability, everyone needs a bit of hope to hang on to. The emergence of the COVID-19 crisis was first centered on ensuring the health and welfare of our patients, families, and employees. As the pandemic progresses, there has been a shift to not only focus on clinical wellbeing but also on maintaining resiliency and reducing compassion fatigue. Culture Leaders, Northwell Health Patient Experience

change agents at each site, service lines, and corporate entities are doing their part to find the light in the darkest hours. With an overarching vision set by the Northwell system Office of Patient & Customer Experience (OPCE), Culture Leaders have undertaken the role of discovering new and innovative ways to find the positivity, compassion, humanism, and connection we are all vying for during these uncertain times.

Spreading Positivity

Echoes of Hope

In this overwhelming battle, every recovering COVID-19 patient is a success worth celebrating. To commemorate these triumphs, each hospital has adopted a song as their anthem, playing over the loudspeaker each time a patient is discharged or extubated. From "Here Comes the Sun" to "Don't Stop Believing," these songs are a representation of better times to come. Whether it brings a smile to someone's face, tears to their eyes, or a thought to their mind, this moment of pause gives staff the strength to keep going.

Send-offs for recovered coronavirus patients as they leave the hospital have become touching moments for both the patients and the healthcare workers who treated them. With heavy-hearts staff line the halls, clapping, cheering, and extending well wishes. Ringing through the hallways, these sounds can be heard throughout the hospital. These are the sounds of celebration, of relief, of hope. Commemorating these special moments uplifts the spirits of all, both the staff that is tirelessly working on the frontlines and the patients still fighting for recovery.

Gifts of Gratitude

Daily briefs and team meetings have taken on a new meaning. Aside from the traditional agenda, employees are given the opportunity to publicly recognize a colleague for something that impacted the team, patients, and families. Sentiments of encouragement, strength, and support are interchanged from peer-to-peer. Verbally expressing their gratitude for one another sparks a ripple effect of positivity. While it may seem small, a little appreciation goes a long way.

Hope Huddles

A registered nurse working on a designated COVID-19 unit at one of our tertiary hospitals recognized the significance of providing information and solace to fellow colleagues during the height of the pandemic. In many cases, emergency department and intensive care unit teams only saw the intense acuity and mortality, not seeing first-hand recovery and discharges home. Launching an initiative called “Hope Huddles,” interdisciplinary teams across the hospital come together each shift to share success stories and milestone updates related to COVID patient recovery. These few and far between moments provide an opportunity for pause, reflection, and celebration that their diligent work is indeed making a difference. We have learned that taking this moment fosters an environment of shared purpose, hope, and optimism, giving all involved necessary closure and the strength to keep going.

Glimmer of Light

Prominently displayed whiteboards serve as a visual reminder for staff. Posted in employee entrances, ‘win boards’ highlight the number of COVID-19 patients who have successfully come off a ventilator and are breathing on their own as well as the number of discharged patients on their way to recovery. Seeing a glimmer of success, staff are reminded that they are making a difference, one patient at a time. Using hashtags like “Together We Can” brings about a sense of camaraderie that they are in this together in the fight against COVID-19. Focusing on positivity, the staff is encouraged to remember battles won and continuously look forward to better times to come.

Grateful Moments

One hospital took it upon themselves to seek out gratitude. Cups labeled ‘grateful moments’ were placed on each unit, with the instruction that if employees are overcome with feelings of distraught, they take a pause and write down something or someone that they are grateful for. At the end of each shift, they are read out loud. It may be a simple act but taking the time to reflect on the things that they are thankful for is a reminder of the great things all around us even in times of crisis.

Reflections

We are all in this together. In difficult times there is always a silver lining, President and CEO, Michael J. Dowling reflects, “In many ways we are seeing the best of humanity.” His words reaffirm all the initiatives across the organization that are spreading hope, optimism, and positivity, even during a pandemic. These unprecedented times have refocused our efforts in bringing humanism to the forefront of healthcare. We are reminded daily of why we do what we do, why we wake up every day and continue the fight. We do it for our families, our communities, ourselves, and one another. Through this pandemic, we remember to savor the little moments, strengthen our connections, look for the good in the day-to-day, and lean on others for support.